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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to elaborate on the definitions of child abuse in order to improve the understanding of child abuse. The definitions given by the U.S. House Joint Committee on Child Abuse in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and in research by Holden (1984), are cited. These definitions refer to the nature of abusive acts and the forms in which abuse occurs. Morris (1982) cites five different perspectives on the neglect component found in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the Holden research; these are: (1) a general perspective offered by Gils; (2) the perspective of federal guidelines as summarized by Morris; (3) a medical perspective from Robert ten Bensel; (4) an educational perspective, as offered by the Montgomery City, Maryland public schools; and (5) a social service perspective from Norman Polansky. In a literature review by Miller and Miller (1980), child abuse was explained in terms of eight categories: (1) physical abuse; (2) sexual abuse; (3) psychological abuse; (4) physical neglect; (5) medical care neglect; (6) intentional drugging to modify the behavior of a child; (7) educational deprivation; and (8) abandonment or lack of supervision. These definitions from differing professional perspectives provide dimensions that, when examined simultaneously, offer a diagnosis of child abuse that is more accurate than the ones often used. (BC)

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Child Abuse: Definition
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For many years child abuse has been recognized as an unfortunate phenomenon in today's society. Various attempts have been made to describe the devastating violence inflicted on children and what precipitates this abuse. No single procedure can be commonly prescribed in lieu of a complex diagnostic process, that can in any way eliminate this problem. This complexity has been the result of a variety of situations in addition to diverse interactions and reactions between the perpetrator and the victim of the abuse.

The issue has been further complicated by the consideration of the abused child in the educational system. The actions, reactions, and attitudes of educators toward the abused child vary as do the relationships between the victim and the victimizing caregiver. State mandates exist in all fifty states in which suspicion of abuse alone requires the observer to take specific action and report the situation. However, these mandates were of little consequence when informants were unaware of the indicators of the problem. This failure to report such symptoms was often the result of personal attitudes which inhibited the individual's ability to file abuse complaints.

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The overwhelming problem of child abuse was thus conceived in various situations, numerous participants and multiple interactions. The problem involved peripheral persons who became willing or unwilling co-participants. Thus, the relationship investigated required separate consideration of the varied roles and factors.

For the purpose of this presentation, the differing views of the definitions of child abuse will be discussed. Because this phenomenon is multifaceted in nature, the definitions of abuse are varied. An examination of the definitions of child abuse indicates that this complex social problem reflects the bias of the affiliation of the particular source or agency that touches the lives of the participants in the unfortunate interaction.

Definitions

Definitions which apply to child abuse differ as do every factor of this social problem. The complexity of the abusive interaction warrants the consideration of numerous professional vantage points. This multiplicative analysis yields a better understanding of the multifaceted societal concern.

The United States House Joint Committee on Child Abuse submitted to the House of Representatives of the 66th Legislature a definition that stated:

> The term 'child abuse' evokes in the minds of most citizens a vision of the battered child--a helpless victim of a brutal or sadistic attack by a parent. In reality 'child abuse' consists of a much broader category of acts of commission (abuse) or omission (neglect) that might be more precisely termed 'child maltreatment'.

Holden (1984) sought to ascertain the attitudes of school personnel toward the reporting of child abuse. The subjects' attitudes were assessed before and after a treatment program. Holden (1984) stated the definition as follows:

> . . . child abuse and/or neglect: a situation in which a child's physical or mental welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts or omissions of his/her parent or any other person responsible for his/her welfare (p. 7).

Holden's definition offered that the abuser may be the parent or any other person liable for the child's welfare. Public Law 93-247, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defined child abuse as:

> . . . physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened (Public Law 93-247, 31, Jan., 1974).

While both previous definitions referred to the nature of the abusive acts, Public Law 93-247 specified forms in which the abuse occurred.

The previous definitions added new components to the same problem and included issues that reflected the preference of the prescriber. Morris (1982) designed an inservice program for teachers in the rural area of York County, South Carolina for the purpose of educating teachers on the problem and the reporting of child abuse. As child abuse transcends numerous professional areas and is subject to the different professional inclinations, Morris listed the neglect component found in the previously mentioned definitions which were ascertained from five different perspectives. These definitions serve as an overview of the different and prevalent points of view that result from professional bias and govern attitudes and subsequent involvement in child abuse.

Morris (1982) cited a definition given by Gils as an example of a general description of abuse. Child abuse is explained as:

> Any act of commission or omission by individuals, institutions or society as a whole, and any conditions resulting from such acts or inaction which deprived children of equal rights and liberties and/or interfere with their optimal development (p. 13).

Federal guidelines were evaluated and summarized by Morris (1982) who presented the following:

> The neglected child is any child who: (a) lacks the proper and parental care by reason of the faults or habits of his parent, guardian or custodian (b) a child whose parents, guardian or custodian neglects or refuses to provide proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical or surgical care or other care necessary for his health, morals or well being (p. 13).

From the medical standpoint, Robert ten Bensel (Morris, 1982) reported that:

> Physical neglect refers, to the failure by parents to provide the basic physiological needs for the child. This includes failure to provide for adequate nutrition and clothing for the child and also encompasses proper medical care (the child's right to medical diagnosis and treatment) and provision for a safe environment in which the child can live (p. 13)..

A model program from the Montgomery City Public Schools in Montgomery City, Maryland was utilized to state an educational position for considering child abuse/neglect, as follows:

> A neglected child may be any one of the following: (1)Malnourished; ill-clad; dirty; without proper shelter or sleeping arrangements; lacking appropriate health care (2) Unattended without adequate supervision (3) Ill and lacking essential medical care (4) Denied normal experiences that produce feelings of being loved, wanted, secure (5) Unlawfully kept from attending school (6)Exploited, overworked (7) Emotionally disturbed due to continuous friction in the home, marital discord, mentally ill parents and (8) Exposed to unwholesome and demoralizing circumstances (Morris, 1982, p. 14).

Norman Polansky's definition was used to express the bias of the social service system (Morris, 1982). This definition stated that:

> Child neglect may be defined as a condition in which a caretaker responsible for the child either deliberately or by extraordinary inattentiveness permits the child to experience avoidable present suffering and/or fails to provide one or more of the ingredients generally deemed essential for developing a person's physical, intellectual and emotional capacities (p. 14).

Miller and Miller (1980) reviewed the literature regarding the parameters of the term child abuse and concluded that child abuse was most thoroughly explained through the categorization of the abusive acts into one of eight sections. The first category was physical abuse, explained as injuries resulting from nonaccidental trauma that were inflicted upon the victim. Next, sexual abuse was considered to be the sexual exploitation of any victim under the age of eighteen.

Third, psychological abuse was described as maladapted parent-child interactions. Fourth, Miller and Miller (1980) described physical neglect as the failure to meet the most basic needs of a child. Fifth, medical care neglect was given as the failure of a care-giver to obtain medical care for a child's treatable acute or chronic illnesses. The use of drugs to modify the behavior of a child was termed as intentional drugging, the sixth category cited in the extensive definition of child abuse.

Educational deprivation which was the intentionally induced truancy of the child for the ultimate purpose of the care-giver was the seventh category. The last type of abuse found in the

examination of definitions and forms of abuse was that of abandonment or lack of supervision, the intermittent or permanent nonsupervision of the child by those in charge of the child's custodial care.

The complexity and diversity of the numerous factors involved in the abusive situation necessitates an in-depth evaluation of a description of this phenomenon. Definitions from differing professional perspectives attempt to provide dimensions that when examined simultaneously offer a more realistic diagnosis. The purpose of this presentation was to elaborate on the definition of child abuse to help provide a more accurate understanding of this unfortunate social atrocity.

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